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SUBJECT: PM CLARK'S MARKS INDEPENDENCE DAY: NZ MEDIA REPORTS

11. SUMMARY: At the Embassy's July 4 reception, Prime Minister Clark's gave a speech that described the bilateral relationship as "of fundamental importance to our country and one which we greatly value". She stressed our shared values and expressed her desire for the relationship to "continue to grow and develop". Her comments were widely reported by the New Zealand media.

The country's media have also been considering the significance of the Prime Minister's attendance at the Embassy's Independence Day function for the first time in her seven years as PM. Commentators describe her participation as "purposeful" and intended as a "goodwill gesture." END SUMMARY.

PRIME MINISTER CLARK DESCRIBES THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AND SHARED VALUES

12. Audio aired on Radio New Zealand's influential, flagship breakfast program, Morning Report on July 5, had Prime Minister Clark noting values that are shared by New Zealand and the United States.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT: For us it is also a day when New Zealanders can reaffirm the strong friendship we have with the United States. We share the values of freedom and democracy which are being celebrated her this evening--and we do have a long history of working together for a free, democratic, secure and prosperous world. END TRANSCRIPT.

13. The (07/05/06) capital-based Dominion Post (the country's second largest circulation daily newspaper) characterized the speech as follows.

BEGIN TEXT: Prime Minister Helen Clark said July 4 was a day for New Zealanders to reaffirm "our strong friendship" with the US. She spoke of the long history of working together toward a free and prosperous world. END TEXT.

14. The country's largest circulation daily, the (07/05/06) Auckland-based New Zealand Herald, added:

BEGIN TEXT: A jovial Helen Clark received a warm welcome at the US Embassy's colorful Wellington bash, where she delivered a short but positive speech emphasizing the bright side of New Zealand's relationship with the United States.

"New Zealand and the United States have worked alongside each other in many conflicts from World War One on," Helen Clark said.

"Our servicemen and women are cooperating today in Afghanistan to help restore stability there and give development a chance, as well as to counter terrorism."

The Prime Minister then went on to say that New Zealand's relationship with the United States "is of fundamental importance to our country, and one which we greatly value".

"I know it will continue to grow and develop in the 21st century as it has in the past." END TEXT.

MEDIA AND OTHERS CONSIDER THE SIGNIFICANCE ON THE PM'S ATTENDANCE.

15. Radio New Zealand reporting predicted that the United States would welcome "Helen Clark's goodwill gesture" and reported that the gesture even enjoyed qualified support from her political Opposition.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT: It is a sentiment that National's Deputy Gerry

Brownlee has...sympathy for. While describing it as 'interesting' that it was Helen Clark's first appearance at Independence Day celebrations in 7 years he believes that there is clearly a thawing in relations. END TRANSCRIPT.

¶16. The New Zealand Herald article headed "Party guest on more than a social visit" (07/05/06) said the PM's attendance was intended to send a signal.

BEGIN TEXT: However, while her office was keen to play down any significance in her appearance it is difficult to read the Prime Minister's move as anything other than purposeful - albeit small. END TEXT.

¶17. Both television networks agreed. TV3's political editor noted "It won't be lost on the Americans that Helen Clark has taken the time to attend these celebrations" (07/04) and TVNZ's political editor adding his opinion "...it is significant that she hasn't been before and is now attending this Fourth of July and there have been some signs of a thawing in the relationship." (07/04)

¶18. Three days later (07/07/06) TVNZ continued to highlight the significance with their political editor, Guyon Espiner, saying: BEGIN TRANSCRIPT: Well you bring it back to human relations. If your friend has a birthday party and you don't show, you can say well we are still friends- I just didn't turn up. But turning up means something doesn't it? And international relations are the same. It's the same when you greet someone -- do you give them a kiss on the cheek, do you hug them, do you shake their hand- those are gestures that we have in our relations with other people are the same with countries and of course it means something if you turn up for the first time. She wanted to make that known- they would have appreciated it. These things get written down and cabled over to Washington- of course they mean something. END TRANSCRIPT.

¶19. The July 4 edition of the Dominion Post ran an article entitled

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"Clark flies July 4 truce flag" in which they reported:

BEGIN TEXT: Prime Minister Helen Clark, in what appears to be a goodwill gesture, is likely to attend Independence Day celebrations organized by the United States embassy. END TEXT.

However the following day they reported "[The PM] was able to attend this year's celebrations because she was not taking her normal winter holiday during the two-week parliamentary recess."

¶10. (SBU) Embassy Officers confirm that it is rare for the New Zealand Prime Minister to attend any foreign country's national day event. We understand from GNZ sources that Clark's office has played down her attendance and repeatedly referred to her very full diary in order to avoid setting expectations that she will attend other national day functions. They also want to make clear that her usual non-attendance is not meant as a slight.

¶11. CONCLUSION: Prime Minister Clark's interaction with the Embassy on Independence Day was widely noted by the New Zealand media. The consensus of New Zealand commentators is that both her attendance and her speech were intended as deliberate, and very public, goodwill gestures.

MCCORMICK